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By many the book will be read with interest, as it certainly has been by the reviewer. However, owing to its superficial treatment of well-worked material, with the absence of bibliographies and any definite contribution to knowledge, its usefulness is open to question.

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GNOMIC POETRY IN ANGLO-SAXON, edited with introduction, notes, and glossary by Blanche Colton Williams, Ph.D. New York, Columbia University Press, 1914. XIII 171 pp.

This monograph comprises 1. a general introduction of eighty-one pages, in which are considered the definitions of *gnome* and *gnomic*, the origins of gnomes, the nature and frequency of gnomic utterance in the Poetic Edda and in Anglo-Saxon poetry, and the conservation of gnomic poetry; 2. a detailed consideration of the Exeter Gnomes and the Cotton Gnomes, consisting of an introduction of thirty-one pages, a critical text, twenty-three pages of notes, and a glossary.

In the general introduction, the author, after considering many definitions of *gnome* and various attempts to separate gnomes from proverbs, arrives at her working definition of the term: "In this study the word 'gnomic' is synonymous with 'sententious.' The adjective is applied to a generalization of any nature whatsoever. Such generalization may or may not be proverbial; it may express a physical truth, announce a moral law, or uphold an ethical ideal. The language may be literal or figurative." That is, a *gnome* is *any* sententious generalization—certainly an inclusive definition, but necessarily so if it is to take in sayings such as *Forst sceal frēosan*, *Winter byð cealdost*, and the like; which indeed are sententious only on the assumption that much more is meant than meets the ear.

In discussing origins, the author, after noting the existence of *gnomes* in the earliest literature of all peoples, concludes that the Teutons developed a *gnomology* of their own uninfluenced by the *gnomology* of any other peoples. This, of course, on *a priori* grounds is very probable, though one cannot assume that the gnomes which have been preserved belong to this supposed native stock. The case of these sententious generalizations may be similar to that of the riddles: there may have been collections of them in Latin just as there were collections of riddles in Latin; and there certainly is sententious generalization in the writings of Jerome, St. Augustine, Gregory, and Boethius—to mention only a few of the Latin authors in the library at York—which Miss Williams does not consider.

Turning to the Poetic Edda, the author finds in the epic and dramatic lays of the Gods few gnomes, but in the didactic lays a great many. The lays of heroes all contain gnomic wisdom on such themes as "fate," "circumspection in speech," "woes of men," "courage and cowardice," "women," and "wisdom of the old." Anglo-Saxon poetry, "heathen" and Christian, is next considered. In *Beowulf* are twenty-three gnomic passages. Of these, "most are heathen; some are mixed with Christian sentiments, as if the author had turned old matter to new purposes; one or two may be entirely Christian. In some cases, it is impossible to separate the two elements." In the reviewer's opinion such separation is impossible in most if not in all cases: it is extremely doubtful that of these passages "most are heathen." *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Banished Wife's Lament*, and *The Song of Deor* are the other so-called heathen poems considered. With regard to the Christian poems, the author concludes that many gnomes have their origin in the Scriptures, and that the gnomes are fewer than in the "heathen" poems. One reason suggested for the smaller number is: "Christian poetry is more or less didactic; it rejects accretions of wisdom in compact form, preferring sermons instead." Would it not be better to say that the Christian redactors (or authors), when dealing with material not essentially religious in character, felt called upon frequently to interject sententious generalizations to point a moral, and that when dealing with strictly religious themes they did not so often feel such necessity?

Finally, the conservation of gnomic wisdom (presumably of a non-religious character, though this point is not made clear) the author conceives to have been one of the functions of the *þyle* (O. N. *þulr*).

The author next gives an analysis of the three gnomic poems of the Exeter Book, or rather of the three collections of gnomes—for they are hardly *poems* in the ordinary sense of the term. After suggesting the possibility that either Alfred or Aldhelm was the author of these collections—fortunately they may both still be presumed to be innocent since they have not been proved to be guilty—Miss Williams concludes: "But any ascription of authorship is hazardous. At best, it may be said that the Exeter Gnoms were put together in the eighth or ninth century by a West Saxon writer. He was acquainted with the Germanic customs, traditions and sayings; he was, at the same time, familiar with the teachings of Christianity. If the elements drawn from Germanic lore were written down earlier, then the Christian reviser inserted lines of later origin and modified the framework, to some extent, to fit the new theology."

With regard to the nature of the collection in the Cotton MS., we are told that "there are two possible choices: either we have a combination of a poem exceedingly old and a few lines of homiletic verse comparatively new; or we have a single poem composed

under the conditions of a changing belief." In any case, "some now forgotten monk with a crude gift for verse-making roughly put together the two elements—heathen and Christian, the second contribution being his own. Later, the verses may have been used as a school exercise; perhaps for copy-books, perhaps for memorization, possibly as a model for alliterative composition." Why crude verses roughly put together should be used as a model is not very clear.

So much for the introduction, which, it must be confessed, does not throw much light upon these dark sayings. What was the purpose of the author or compiler of these collections? Was there any method in his incoherence when he wrote in apparently hit-or-miss fashion what must in large part have been obvious truisms? Furthermore, with regard to origins—and this, in the reviewer's opinion is an important matter—the author should have kept in mind that there was a large amount of Latin didactic verse and prose which might well have contributed to the collections.

Miss Williams' texts do not call for much comment: her readings differ very slightly from the Grein-Wülker text, i. e., in only seven words. In five of these cases she follows the MS., in preference to emendations; and in one case she emends (Cot. l. 10, *Swicolost* to *Switolost*) where the Grein-Wülker text follows the MS. Miss Williams' punctuation, compared with that of Grein-Wülker, will in general be found, by American readers at least, to be superior.

The notes on the text, occupying twenty-three pages, are very full and show familiarity with the literature of the subject. In various instances one may not agree with the author's interpretation of a word or phrase: for instance, no sufficient reason seems to be adduced for preferring *meat* (*flesh*) to *food* as a translation of *mete* in Ex. 115.

Some typographical errors are *ēawum* for *fēawum* (p. 76), *yle* for *pyle* (p. 77), and *swiost* for *swiðost* (p. 111).

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NOTES

In the fifth volume of *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, Professor Oliver Elton has collected six articles: *Rhythm in English Verse, Prose, and Speech* by D. S. Mac Coll; *The Novels of Mark Rutherford*, by A. E. Taylor; *English Place-Names and Teutonic Sagas*, by F. W. Moorman; *Shelley's Triumph of Life*, by F. Melian Stowell; *Emily Brontë*, by J. C. Smith; and *Translations from Old into Modern English*, by A. Blyth Webster. Mr. Mac Coll's paper is largely in defense of Lanier's *Science of English Verse*, his line of argument bringing him into conflict with Professor Saintsbury's prosody, which he stigmatizes as "the wreck or ghost of the Greek system imperfectly understood, and apart from that system, unintelligible." So far as prose rhythm is concerned the author invites the reader "to regard Prose and Verse not as